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THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF THE HERD ¹

THE importance of *crises* in all organic development has been emphasized by recent anthropologists and sociologists. The crisis or unexpected "fix" in which a creature finds itself furnishes the test of its capacity of readjustment. In the case of man, crisis centers attention on unobserved or ill-understood factors in a situation and may happily lead to more complete control and thus to escape from pressing difficulties. The present war is a crisis of unprecedented magnitude, and is inevitably promoting thinking of unprecedented variety and depth in regard to man's woes, their origin, nature and remedy. The English philosopher Bertrand Russell, surprised in his abstract and subtle metaphysical and mathematical speculations by undreamed-of horrors, directs the resources of an extraordinarily free and highly trained intelligence to the solution of the problem of why we act as we do. He says :

To me the chief thing to be learnt through the war has been a certain view of the springs of human action, what they are, and what we may legitimately hope that they will become. This view, if it is true, seems to afford a basis for political philosophy more capable of standing erect in a time of crisis than the philosophy of traditional Liberalism has shown itself to be.

His chief theme is not war but rather the great and fundamental reconstruction of economic and social life which shall ultimately make war repugnant to men.

The writer is not versed in the social sciences ; he betrays no knowledge of his predecessors in this field of speculation. But if he has *read* little, he seems to have *lived* much, and is evidently acquainted at first hand with men's hopes and dreads, their loves and hates, their timidity and heroism ; " and without understanding and sympathy it is impossible to find a cure for the evil from which the world is suffering." This understanding and sympathy combined with a simple and unaffected mode of presentation insure his little book a wide appeal. For they serve to disguise and palliate the absolute ruthlessness with which the author sweeps away the ancient foundations of morality and

¹ Why Men Fight; A Method of Abolishing the International Duel. By Bertrand Russell. New York, The Century Company, 1917. 272 pp.

Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War. By W. Trotter. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1916. 213 pp.

religion. His is clearly such an exceptionally sweet and decent and high-minded nature that even the timid conservative may forget to recoil with proper horror when he reaches page 200 and reads: "It ought to be recognized that the law is only concerned with marriage through the question of children, and should be indifferent to what is called 'morality,' which is based upon custom and texts of the Bible, not upon any real consideration of the needs of the community." The gentle reader will already have weathered on page 134 the conclusion that "no good to the community, of any sort or kind, results from the private ownership of land. If men were reasonable, they would decree that it should cease tomorrow, with no compensation beyond a moderate life income to the present holders." Taken from their context, these passages produce the impression of lawless radicalism; in the setting in which Mr. Russell places them they seem almost as safe and harmless as the fireside musings of a Presbyterian elder who has just lent ten thousand dollars on a six per cent mortgage.

The object of life is *growth* and to "the principle of growth" the author devotes his first lecture. Now our present institutions are not designed to promote the free and joyous development of the individual as a member of society, for "all our institutions have their historic basis in Authority," and the main purpose of all ancient authority is to hamper the great mass of people and keep them in a safe routine. The promotion of personal adventure is not the object of the Justinian Code, the church, the state, the school, or the institution of matrimony. They all agree in harshly recommending a patient conformity rather than cheerful self-expansion. Accordingly Mr. Russell reviews the disastrous effects of existing institutions under the following headings: "The State," "War as an Institution," "Property," "Education," "Marriage and the Population Question," "Religion and the Churches," with a final chapter on "What we can Do."

As for the state, the author's aim is to show "how great, how unnecessary, how harmful, many of its powers are, and how enormously they might be diminished without loss of what is useful in its activity." "It is the essence of the State to suppress violence within and to facilitate it without. The State makes an entirely artificial division of mankind and of our duties towards them; towards one group we are bound by law, towards the other only by the prudence of highwaymen." The very vastness of the modern state results in a sense of personal helplessness, which is paralyzing to individual initiative. So the state is "one of the chief causes of misery in the modern world and one of the main reasons for the discouragement which prevents men from

growing to their full mental stature." The remedy seems to lie in a complete revision of the external relations of states to one another, together with far more spontaneous internal social combination, of which syndicalism is an adumbration, under general state control.

Property represents an excessive emphasis on *possession* as against the joys of *creation*. The writer believes that

incalculable benefits might result from industrial democracy, either on the co-operative model or with the recognition of a trade or industry as a unit for purposes of government, with some kind of Home Rule such as syndicalism aims at securing. There is no reason why all governmental units should be *geographical*: this system was necessary in the past because of the slowness of means of communication, but it is not necessary now.

Our present methods of education fail conspicuously in "reverence" for the child's individuality and proper freedom. The joy of mental adventure Mr. Russell deems to be far commoner in the young than is ordinarily assumed. However this may be there is certainly no great tendency at present to give it a show.

Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth. . . . It is fear that holds men back—fear lest the institutions by which they live should prove harmful, fear lest they themselves should prove less worthy of respect than they have supposed themselves to be. Should the working man think freely about property? Then what will become of us, the rich? Should young men and young women think freely about sex? Then what will become of morality? Should soldiers think freely about war? Then what will become of military discipline?

There are many frank and sagacious observations on marriage and the relations of men and women out of matrimony. Our old ideas are based on authority, the new must be based on liberty. "Here, as elsewhere, liberty is the basis of political wisdom. And when liberty has been won, what remains to be desired must be left to the conscience and religion of individual men and women." For the older notions of religion Russell naturally has no sympathy; however appropriate they may have been when men knew less, modern knowledge and criticism have destroyed the assumptions on which they were based. To him the problem is to find a harmonious situation in which our fundamental instincts, our powers of reasoning and our kindly interest in our fellow men should one and all receive proper recognition. "Instinct, mind and spirit are each a help to the others when their development is free and unvitiated; but when corruption comes into any one of the three,

not only does that one fail, but the others also become poisoned." The writer is particularly sensitive to the dangerous suppression of instinct in historical religions, especially Christianity. He is also on his guard against an exaggerated intellectualism which is not blended with "reverence" for our fundamental impulses and for our fellow creatures.

This is a highly inadequate account of a truly remarkable book and no one has any business to neglect reading the work itself just because I have failed to reproduce the sweet reasonableness of its brave, free and enlightened author.

Mr. Russell's book appeared in England under the more appropriate title of "Principles of Social Reconstruction." It was received with jeers and taunts by the London *Spectator* and *The Athenæum*. The reviewers regarded its suggestions as too sinful and absurd to deserve a moment's consideration on the part of any right-minded citizen. Of course the attitude of the author toward the present war is sufficient to explain this, but it is to be suspected that his book would have received little sympathy even if it had come out before August 1914. The reason is obvious enough; he opposes himself at every point to the instincts of the herd, whether in peace or at war. Mr. Trotter's volume supplies the key to the whole situation, for he furnishes an incomparable analysis of the basis and nature of social convictions, the essential difficulties involved in any attempt to modify them, and the bitter mortifications which are encountered by those who venture even to criticize them.

In the years 1908 and 1909, Mr. Trotter published two articles in the *Sociological Review* on "Herd Instinct and its Bearing on the Psychology of Civilized Man." These he now republishes with additional "Speculations upon the Human Mind in 1915." He reproduces the original essays as they first appeared, in order to reassure his readers that his reasoning was not distorted by the present crisis.

Mr. Trotter's book is a contribution to social psychology. Indeed he denies that there can be any other kind of psychology, since we know nothing of man in a state of solitude and isolation from a group. While "each of us has the strongest conviction that his conduct and beliefs are fundamentally individual and reasonable," this is a gross illusion. Our beliefs and opinions, like our standards of conduct, come to us insensibly as products of our companionship with our fellow men, not as results of our personal experience and the inferences we individually make from our own observations. We are constantly misled by our extraordinary faculty of "rationalizing"—that is, of devising

plausible arguments for accepting what is imposed upon us by the traditions of the group to which we belong. We are abjectly credulous by nature, and instinctively accept the verdicts of the group. We are suggestible not merely when under the spell of an excited mob or a fervent revival but we are ever and always listening to the *still small voice of the herd*, and are ever ready to defend and justify its instructions and warnings, and accept them as the mature results of our own reasoning.

William James was one of the first to realize that our conduct is largely instinctive, and since his great work appeared a vast amount of highly revolutionary and fruitful discussion has been carried on with the hope of discovering the fundamental springs of conduct and thought. James gives a long list of instincts, including "sociability," for he well understood that man is a gregarious animal. Mr. Trotter satisfies himself with a very general classification—nutrition, reproduction, self-preservation and gregariousness. It is the last of these, together with its natural concomitant, suggestibility, that serves to explain, as he claims, "a large bulk of the furniture of the mind."

Now unhappily instinctive belief is ordinarily indistinguishable in our minds from verifiable knowledge. How are we to separate real reasoning from "rationalizing"? Can we tell whether our cherished beliefs about the state, private property, education and marriage are a careful series of inferences based upon critical observation of the workings of these institutions as they now exist, or are at bottom the current traditions of society? Yes, there is a way of doing this, Mr. Trotter answers. If we are perfectly confident that we are hearkening to the voice of God we may be quite sure that it is the voice of the herd. *Vox dei vox populi*.

Non-rational judgments, being the product of suggestion, will have the quality of instinctive opinion, as we may call it, of belief in a strict sense. The essence of this quality is obviousness. . . . To question it is to the believer to carry skepticism to an insane degree, and will be met by contempt, disapproval, or condemnation, according to the nature of the belief in question. When, therefore, we find ourselves entertaining an opinion about the basis of which there is a quality of feeling which tells us that to inquire into it would be absurd, obviously unnecessary, unprofitable, undesirable, bad form, or wicked, we may know that that opinion is a non-rational one, and probably, founded upon inadequate evidence. Opinions, on the other hand, which are acquired as the result of experience alone do not possess this quality of primary certitude. They are true in the sense of being verifiable, but they are unaccompanied by that profound feeling of

truth which belief possesses, and, therefore, we have no sense of reluctance in admitting inquiry into them.

If we are insolently or complacently confident of the truth of a belief we may be equally confident that we probably have no good reason for accepting it. I remember distinctly my organic revulsion when as a boy I first heard the doctrine of immortality questioned. I had no interest in the matter and no least argument to offer in support of the idea that we should all come to, on the other side of Jordan; nevertheless I felt like striking down the blasphemer. Even so with the reviewers who clubbed Mr. Russell in the *Spectator* and *Athenæum*. They found sweet relief in an easy instinctive reaction which they would have had to forgo if they had allowed their intellects to play over the subject. Moreover as they dealt their blows they could hear the bravos of all their respectable, God-fearing and patriotic fellow citizens. Mr. Russell, on the other hand, must sadly renounce the warm contact of his fellow sheep and reconcile himself to chilly isolation. There is of course the distant possibility that, as has happened in the case of Giordano Bruno, "the generation which he foresaw" may three hundred years hence erect a monument to his memory. But, as the reviewers in the *Spectator* and *Athenæum* tacitly acknowledge, this is cold comfort for a wandering sheep.

We can now begin to see why it is, as Mr. Russell points out in a passage given above, that men fear thinking more than they fear death. It is because honest reasoning is such an unsocial enterprise. And what is unsocial is by a process of rationalization damned as dangerous. This particular piece of rationalizing is based upon the assumption that man is naturally a selfish animal, seeking his own, with at best a secondary, derived, and precarious interest in his fellows. This hypothesis underlay both Calvinism and utilitarianism. To permit and encourage men to think freely might therefore lead to such an inordinate recrudescence of individualism that society would deliquesce, like a rotten mushroom, into its constituent parts, and revert to pristine anarchy. But of such anarchy we have no trace in the history of man or in the organization of the lowliest savages who can be observed today. The conviction is now growing that man is inherently gregarious; too altruistic in many of his habits, above all in his speculations and beliefs. He now finds himself in absolutely unprecedented conditions owing to the recent fundamental modifications in civilization. How is he to adjust himself to these new conditions, meet the new difficulties, and take advantage of the new possibilities which are opening out every

day, unless he free his mind on an unprecedented scale? Reverence for the voice of the herd was never before so fatal as it is now, for never did it involve the acceptance of such preposterous anachronisms, never before such a neglect of the lessons of experience. One of the striking features of savage thought and belief is its impermeability to experience, and there are no more impressive passages in Mr. Trotter's book than his discussion of the conflicts which arise in modern life between the dictates of the herd and individual knowledge and desire. Conscience, the moral sense (as it used to be called), the Freudian "censor," may all be explained as the still small voice of the group, expressing itself in vague disapproval or poignant remorse. Religion is "the consequence of that yearning in us which is identical with the mechanism that binds the wolf to the pack, the sheep to the flock, and to the dog makes the company of his master like walking with God in the cool of the evening" (page 51). It is "normal" to belong to the herd and think its thoughts; it is "abnormal" and "degenerate" to question or oppose its teachings and behests.

The great problem then emerges: How are we to secure mental adaptability and overcome the strong resistance of our gregarious nature? How is honest thinking and expedient and essential skepticism to be made respectable and perhaps even popular? We are deluged with new conditions and new experiences. They cannot be dealt with in old respectable ways, by appeals to ancient authority or reliance on the moral sense. We must foster a new type of mentality, a new frame of mind, and sufficient instability to prepare the way for re-adaptation. We must recognize that mental stability is inappropriate to an age of increasingly rapid change in our environment due to the applications of scientific knowledge.

It is this survival, so to say, of the waggoner upon the foot plate of the express engine, which has made the modern history of nations a series of such breathless adventures and hairbreadth escapes. To those who are able to view national affairs from an objective standpoint, it is obvious that each of these escapes might very easily have been a disaster, and that sooner or later one of them must be such [page 55].

This ominous sentence was written about ten years ago. The European ministries continued to "rationalize" their vain system of diplomacy; the Germans stood by their leader and his tribal god; they allowed too many essential considerations to escape them, and the disaster is upon us, far outrunning in magnitude anything Mr. Trotter would have ventured to forecast. Such is the penalty for listening to

the voice of the herd once too often ; such is the price we are all paying, the world over, for a certain freeing of the mind which we can already happily detect in the midst of the frenzy of battle.

That portion of Mr. Trotter's book which was written under the influence of the war is devoted partly to very ingenious and often amusing developments of the fundamental theories set forth in the original essays, partly to an attempt to establish the salient differences between the English and the German point of view. Germany represents a lupine or wolfish, predatory form of gregariousness, to which the individual must necessarily conform. England, on the other hand, suggests the organization of the beehive, ill-suited to aggression and conquest. To the writer this is no vague analogy or parable—as it will seem to many readers—but the biological basis of a crucial historical issue.

If we desire to get any insight into the mind and moral power of Germany, we must begin with the realization that the two peoples are separated by a profound difference in instinctive feeling. Nature has provided but few roads for gregarious species to follow. Between the path England finds herself in and that which Germany has chosen there is a divergence which almost amounts to a specific difference in the biological scale. In this, perhaps, lies the cause of the desperate and unparalled ferocity of this war. It is a war not so much of contending nations as of contending species. We are not taking part in a mere war, but in one of Nature's august experiments. It is as if she had set herself to try out in her workshop the strength of the socialized and aggressive types. To the socialized peoples she has entrusted the task of proving that her old faith in cruelty and blood is at last an anachronism. To try them, she has given substance to the creation of a nightmare, and they must destroy this werewolf or die.

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